Ethical Reconstruction? Primitive Accumulation in the Apparel Sector of Eastern Sri Lanka

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Annelies Goger and Kanchana N. Ruwanpura
October 2014

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Garment Factory Programme	GFP
Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna	JVP
Joint Apparel Association Forum	JAAF
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	LTTE
United National Party	UNP
United States Agency for International Development	USAID

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> Friends, we have brought massive development to the North and East regions as never witnessed in history after removing their fear of death. *Uthuru Vasanthaya* (Northern Spring) and *Nagenahira Navodaya* (Eastern Awakening) are some of the major development projects in the country.
>
> President Mahinda Rajapaksa[1]

Introduction

The end of the 30-year conflict in May 2009 ushered in a new era of development in Sri Lanka, in which the state framed the path to peace in terms of an economic development imperative. As suggested by the president's remarks, 'massive development' in the North and East was seen as the saviour of the people from a violent past and the key mechanism for bringing about an 'awakening' of the nation. As part of this strategy to deploy economic development as a reconciliation strategy, the Sri Lankan government forged alliances with industry leaders in the private sector–although, as traced below, this state-business partnership has historical precedence. Because it is one of the largest manufacturing sectors in Sri Lanka, the garment industry figured prominently in the plans to redevelop the North and East.

There is a burgeoning literature on the Sri Lankan government's approach to reconstruction and reconciliation (Bastian 2013; Keerawella 2013), as well as on what militarisation means for labour in Southern post-war Sri Lanka (Hewamanne 2009). Yet, there are few studies that address the role of industrial capital and its relationship with the state in the post-war landscape. In this paper, we begin to address this gap by examining how the garment industry and the Sri Lankan state formed an alliance as part of a coordinated effort to shift garment production to the former conflict areas of the North and East. We argue that capital is deeply imbricated in the Sri Lankan state's militarised nation-building efforts as it embarked upon a process of primitive accumulation in a post-war context.[2] Furthermore, we suggest that it matters *how* this process of setting up factories and creating a workforce occurs in terms of whether economic models of reconciliation are challenging or re-inscribing old power asymmetries and tensions.

This is an exploratory paper based on findings from a three-day site visit to a garment factory in the East, Factory A, which aims to open up new lines of inquiry into capital-state

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1 Ministry of External Affairs, Sri Lanka, "Address by President Mahinda Rajapaksa on the 62nd Anniversary of Independence," http://www.mea.gov.lk/index.php/media/news-archive/2287-address-by-president-mahinda-rajapaksa-on-the-62nd- anniversary-of-independence (accessed 26 January 2014).

2 Note: We are not arguing that capital is the 'driving' force in this dynamic, but instead that the state and capital are relationally engaged in a dialectic that forms an alliance, through which mutually beneficial goals are identified, negotiated and implemented. We are not contending that capital is under the captive control of the state or vice versa, but that it is an ongoing process of negotiation.

alliances in the process of rebuilding the nation after the war. The visit was part of a larger study of elite networks in the garment industry that employed multi-sited rather than place-based ethnographic methods, because it sought to understand how power relations, discourses and practices circulate and connect through globalised networks of production (Marcus 1998; Burawoy 2001). The study focussed on interviews with managers, government officials and industry associations, and it involved observations of the factory and informal discussions with managers about their careers, aspirations and the working day. As such, it represents a partial perspective, but also one that is valuable for unpacking how managers' discourses and practices reconfigure systems of power and shape worker subjectivities (Goger 2013; Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006). Although incorporating worker and community resident perspectives was not in the scope of research conducted thus far, it is an important task for further research.

We start our paper by outlining the basis for this reconciliation via reconstruction strategy, showing how the corporate sector had developed close relationships with the state to protect its economic interests against a backdrop of intense conflict. Despite the increased militarisation of Sri Lankan society, international donors also participated in forging alliances between capital and the state in order to preserve open market policies that had been dominant since the late 1970s (see also Harvey 2005). We then go on to draw upon empirical evidence from Factory A to present our empirical findings about the management ethos, the creation of a new labouring class and the rescripting of the narrative of the nation state. Then, we conclude the paper by reflecting on the findings, their implications for our understanding of primitive accumulation and areas for further research.

Sri Lanka: Reconciliation via Reconstruction?

Until 2009 Sri Lanka was besieged by a 30-year ethnic war and conflict, which ceased with the military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) – the main separatist group espousing a hard-line Tamil nationalist line. In the post-war context, the Sri Lankan state has celebrated how its ability to end bloody violence and once again consolidate a juridical entity called Sri Lanka hailed a historical opportunity to create the national space to usher in growth and prosperity for all its communities.

The political capital of the Sri Lankan state acquired through the defeat of the LTTE, indisputably created a historic opportunity for forging state-society relations, although it has done so in a manner that disproportionately benefits the political interests of the current ruling regime. The palpable relief felt by a local populace who had encountered three decades of death and destruction has left them enraptured by a Sinhalese-nationalist state espousing reconstruction as the only pathway to reconciling enduring political tensions between ethnic communities. A resounding military victory has also reinforced and legitimised the increasing militarisation of Sri Lankan society (de Mel 2007; Hewamanne 2009).

The policies of the post-war Sri Lankan state have been increasingly scrutinised and critiqued for the ways in which they have been hamstrung by a militarised Sinhalese-nationalist ideology (Bastian 2013; Keerawella 2013). Venugopal (2011) argues that this unwitting military expansion by the state was a necessity to diffuse the social impacts of market reform, which went ahead unabated from the 1980s through the war years. The continued withdrawal of social security meant that the state had to respond to the political morality underlying Sinhalese nationalism, specifically the need for the state to be attentive to growing socio-economic inequalities by fulfilling "the material and spiritual needs of the poor" (Ibid.: 70). The state did so primarily by creating employment via the military, which was not subject to the same level of purview or concern by multilateral agencies because the Sri Lankan state ostensibly was carrying out a war against terrorism. The service and industrial sector jobs created by the private sector, Venugopal (2011) argues, were in no substantial way able to mop up the fallout from the gradual erosion of the welfare state. Therefore, the gradual but unabated market reform ultimately led to state-society relations being configured, entailing in no small measure the deepening of capitalist relations, such that capital, too, is now imbricated in the nature and shape of post-war Sri Lanka.

Indeed, reconciliation via reconstruction is old hat in the Sri Lankan policy realm, germinating under a previous pro-market political regime – United National Party (UNP) – where 'business for peace' was the mainstay political rhetoric between 2001 and 2004 (Venugopal 2010). During much of the prolonged conflict period, the Sri Lankan economy managed to avoid any notable collapse (Venugopal 2011). However, by the late 1990s the economic fault lines of continued warfare and its effect on the business community started to emerge with a series of successful attacks by the LTTE in the nerve centre of the capital, Colombo (Venugopal 2010). The global recession of 2001, coming together with a series of sustained attacks and a drought, resulted in economic contraction for the first time since independence (Bastian 2013: 7). Thus, the UNP was elected to power with a commitment to stabilising the economy and securing peace.

Opportunely, by this time the business community had articulated a position that the war was an indulgence and a burden, with their interventions framing the politics of 'liberal' peace (Venugopal 2010: 224). Sri Lanka was to be regained within the auspices of pro-market reform, where procuring peace was one dimension to "one component of a corporate wish-list" (Ibid: 225). Within three months of being elected to power, the UNP negotiated a ceasefire agreement, the essence of which was to co-opt the LTTE to accept a neoliberal economic agenda and market reforms in return for letting it formally control areas that it had de facto control over (Bastian 2013). Yet because the UNP's efforts at regaining liberal peace were limited to private sector involvement with no wide-ranging public consultations carried out, Venugopal notes how "it effectively lacked the political … ownership of any domestic constituency except the corporate sector" (2010: 228). The fiscal austerity measures pursued with cuts in subsidies and public sector employment during this time amplified the palpable grievances and unpopularity of a liberal peace agenda (Ibid.).

The inherent contradictions of pursuing a market-driven peace effort eventually fell apart, paving the way for the militarisation strategy of the current ruling regime in 2009 and its eventual military victory over the LTTE. Since then, the political climate in post-war Sri Lanka has become increasingly authoritarian; yet the space for the business sector to actively reclaim the space to provide economic opportunities befitting a post-war country through business activity has persisted.

The orthodox doctrine is one of reconstruction and reconciliation; the fervent belief – as communicated by the president is that economic development generated by reconstruction alone has the capacity to reconcile ethnic identity politics (Bastian 2013). The charge levelled against the language of reconciliation is that it absolves the government from its trusteeship to engage in reforming the state in order to accommodate plural identities at multiple levels of structures, public policy and state identity (Bastian 2013; Keerawella 2013; Thaheer, et.al. 2013).

Correspondingly, by emphasising development as the discursive terrain within which reconstruction and reconciliation takes place in post-war Sri Lanka, Bastian (2013) argues that the social contradictions inherent in capitalism are masked. While there is veracity to this line of thinking, the Sri Lankan state's foray into the sphere of development and the deployment of this rhetoric is not recent (Tennekoon 1988; Brow 1996); the novelty at this current historical juncture is how the language of development is disposed to refract the likely perpetuation of class-ethnic contradictions in a post-war setting. In any event, the reconstruction and development tropes fit in well with the Sinhalese-nationalist spirit of the Rajapaksa regime; how do these incongruities, however, work themselves out in the sphere of capital incursions into post-war areas of the country? Specifically, how is local capital implicated in these same processes, and how do they too – whether wittingly or not – promote a 'peace for business' agenda, neglecting the specific spatialities of a post-war setting?

Venugopal (2011) has traced the discursive terrain for the rise of 'military fiscalism' in Sri Lanka during the war years. He argues how military spending is progressively linked to the polity and the economy. With the onset of market reforms, economic inequality – as measured by the gini coefficient – increased between 1980 and 1992, with a particularly sharp jump between 1990 and 2002 (Ibid: 71). There were higher concentrations of severe poverty in rural areas because the removal of agricultural subsidies and other market reforms contributed to widespread declines in the agricultural sector (Venugopal 2011: 74). This raised the possibility of a peasant calamity, and the military took on the role of a stabilising force, as it became the single largest employer for young rural men who had few private sector alternatives (Venugupal 2011: 71). Dismantling the social democratic state, in Venugopal's (2011) analysis, was mitigated through state patronage towards the military and his final analysis calls for further scrutiny of development and destruction as closely linked spheres.

Nevertheless, Venugopal (2010, 2011) is silent about the role that capital may be playing in military fiscalism. This gap offers us the space to animate this mediation. In contrast to

Venugopal who argues that market reform elitists "were least invested in the project of Sinhala Nationalism and in the continuation of the war" (2011: 69), we want to trace how capital too has been an indispensable bedfellow for a politics of military fiscalism to be perpetuated in post-war Sri Lanka. We use the conceptual lens of primitive accumulation to theoretically frame and appraise its applicability in a post-war setting, where vast populations of the North and East – particularly those who were under de facto LTTE control – had been effectively divorced from the socio-economic changes in the rest of the country over the past three decades (Thaheer, et.al. 2013). Although we are not arguing that the East was purely non-capitalist prior to the recent influx of industrial capital, we have chosen 'primitive accumulation' rather than 'accumulation by dispossession' because the changes underway in the East bear more resemblance to original accumulation and an initial process of proletarianisation than they do to devaluation stemming from a crisis of over-accumulation (Harvey 2003).

Primitive Accumulation in a Post-War Context

To set the broader context of the transformations underway in the East as the government incentivises businesses to commence industrial operations there, we draw on the concept of primitive accumulation, along with more recent literature that expands on it. Drawing on Adam Smith, Marx depicted 'so-called primitive accumulation' at the end of Volume 1 of *Capital* as a transformation of social relations that makes the emergence of surplus possible (Glassman 2006; Marx 1990). He referred to it as the creation of the original capital that is necessary to start a process of capitalist accumulation and expansion.[3] The transformation involves the separation of the producer from the means of production, an expropriation of agricultural producers from the land to make labour and land available for industrial production (Marx 1990). However, as Harvey (2003) notes, Marx's sketch of primitive accumulation included a wide range of processes: the commodification of land, transformations of property rights, expulsions of peasant populations and their access to the commons, monetisation of economic activities, commodification of labour power, etc. (Harvey 2003: 145). In this paper, we are primarily concerned with how debates about primitive accumulation can inform our analysis of how capital-state relations shape the process of proletarianisation, or the creation of a new class of wage labourers in society (McMichael 1977). Later in this paper we show how the garment industry managers understood their role as changing the mindsets of the workforce so that they would come to see wage labour as valuable and worthwhile, which we argue is doing much more than facilitating the micro-processes of capital accumulation.

As Marx notes, the 'methods' for going about this transformation through history have notoriously been associated with violence, conquest, enslavement and brute force (Marx 1990). This is because it involves the dissolution of previously existing, pre-capitalist relations such that producers have no other option but to sell their labour power on the

[3] One of the key problems that scholars have had with the terminology of 'primitive accumulation' is the implication of the word 'primitive' that it is a one-time occurrence and that it represents a transformation from a purely non-capitalist economy to one that is purely capitalist (Luxemburg 1951; Harvey 2003; Perelman 2000). By using it here we do not intend to romanticise the East by suggesting it was untouched by capitalism prior to the entry of the garment industry, but rather that commodification, monetisation and proletarianisation were quite limited in the North and East through the end of the war, unlike the rest of the country.

market. Reading the end of the war in Sri Lanka through this lens, it is possible to understand how the ending of the war created new possibilities for capitalist accumulation and industrialisation in the North and East, while offering war-weary population livelihood opportunities that were badly needed. For the garment companies, the East offered a surplus population at a time when the industry in other areas of the country was facing labour shortages and retention problems (Goger 2014; Ruwanpura 2014). Therefore, the end of the war and labour shortages and retention elsewhere made it more attractive for the garment industry to cultivate further its alliances with the state in its endeavour to pursue economic development as a reconciliation strategy.

The state also had motivations for strengthening its pacts with capital to bring about the social transformations of primitive accumulation in the North and East. By promoting primitive accumulation in terms of reconciliation and reconstruction, we contend that the Sri Lankan government – through partnerships with capital – was consolidating its symbolic power. Symbolic power is the ability to render histories of struggle and intervention as inevitable, apolitical and natural – or the power to 'enframe' (Mitchell 1990; Loveman 2005). Understanding the state's industrial recruitment strategies as part of the process of primitive accumulation helps reveal how the state and capital deployed these strategies to establish a normative vision for a 'new' Sri Lanka through the labour process. This new Sri Lanka is a modern industrial nation that has overcome ethnic divisions that were imposed from 'outside' colonisers and threatened by terrorists from the 'inside'. In other words, moving garment factories to the North and East can be understood as a mechanism for the state to delineate what counts as 'Sri Lankan' modernisation, which selectively discards some aspects of the past while conserving others.

Since Marx, many scholars have stressed the importance of interpreting primitive accumulation not as a universal phenomenon that is the same everywhere with a clear start and finish, but instead reading it from an anti-essentialist and contextualised perspective (Banaji 1973; Glassman 2006). For example, the crisis tendencies of capitalism lead to the persistence of primitive accumulation – it is always ongoing (Luxemburg 1951; Harvey 2003; Perelman 2000). Banaji (1973) took this argument further by contending that colonial modes of production both dissolved and conserved pre-capitalist forms of production, because the colonial model did not aim to generate broad industrialisation in colonial societies but instead to position the colonies in a servile role. These contributions highlight that primitive accumulation and proletarianisation are often partially deployed and incomplete processes that continue to occur, especially under laissez-faire, or 'free market', capitalism (Perelman 2000). However, Harvey's (2003) concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' does not fit this context well because the state-capital relations that we focus on here are not those in the 'centre' (e.g., US or Europe) trying to resolve a crisis of over-accumulation, but rather a more peripheral (but still powerful) Sri Lankan state that sought to expand to the North and East primarily for other reasons.

In the next section we trace the particularities of eastern Sri Lanka and the post-war experience of local communities to elucidate the state's motivations for incentivising capital to move into the North and East. We also outline the ways in which the state,

together with international donor agencies, has been in the forefront in creating conducive conditions for capital to penetrate into a post-war area. Our exploratory work seems to suggest that despite the documented anxieties, turmoil and trauma of a war-ravaged populace, the priorities of capital have taken precedence over the needs of the local community. The disquiet of a traumatised people were secondary – where serving capital took precedence over negotiating the legacy and aftermath of a three-decade internecine and bloody conflict.

The "Wild East"?[4] Eastern Sri Lanka and Its Uniqueness

Eastern Sri Lanka is a unique part of the country and is much celebrated by feminist scholars for the ways in which matrilineal inheritance patterns and the strong land rights available to women have evolved through time (Agarwal 1990). Consequently, women from both Muslim and Tamil communities in the region have been historically positioned fairly strongly in social relations (McGilvray 2008). Yet the vicissitudes brought about by the conflict tempered and bore upon women and their livelihood strategies in uneven ways (Ruwanpura 2006; Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004), with patriarchal structures embedded within the dominant ethno-nationalist projects oppressively pervading women's lives (Maunaguru 1995; de Alwis 1998). These feminist scholars were pointing to how the conflict was pulling apart the dominant gender regimes, and the need for careful attention to be paid to the fractured and fragile social fabric after the war. Although a deep study of the gender dynamics of the industrialisation process in the East was not in the scope of the present study, it is a critical aspect to investigate in further research, given the history of the area and the fact that the apparel-manufacturing workforce was overwhelmingly women.

Eastern Sri Lanka hosts all three ethnic communities – Muslims, Sinhalese and Tamils, although the relative presence of one community over another varies in each of the three districts that make up the Eastern Province. In Batticaloa District, Tamils and Muslims predominate while Sinhalese have a less significant presence. Over the war years, tensions between Muslim and Tamil communities was palpable, with numerous incidents including LTTE attacks on Muslims while at prayer in a mosque and strains over disbursing post-tsunami aid, epitomising the fractured nature of ethnic relations (see Hasbullah and Korf 2009; Korf, et.al. 2010). Likewise, all communities have registered anxieties over ownership, access and control of land, with the presence of high security zones causing greater fears and recent land grabs adding further consternation (Fonseka and Raheem 2010). Distress over land is particularly pertinent for these communities, as farming on land or being agricultural labourers is the predominant form of employment in the post-war economic context too (Thaheer, et.al. 2013: 74). More generally Thaheer, et.al. (2013) note how fisheries, agriculture and related ancillary sectors are the primary sources of occupation for all three communities, with only the Sinhalese people having a presence in government and security sector occupations. Manufacturing sector jobs and wage occupations in the formal sector are rare or non-existent.

[4] We deliberately use this phraseology for this section for reasons that will be evident in the empirical sections to follow.

In the aftermath of the war, the study by Thaheer, et.al. which is the only extensive study undertaken in the North and concerns the East, also aims to trace the processes of reconciliation, and they highlight the grievances and the palpable insecurity experienced by Muslims and Tamils. Even as all communities acknowledge that post-war Sri Lanka is a place within which their physical security is assured, they do not feel free from fear (2013: 31-32). In other words, when security is conceptualised more broadly, local communities continue to grapple with fractured social relations, community breakdown and familial collapse alongside material deprivation. The vulnerability of Tamils who lived in LTTE-controlled areas, in particular, is highlighted by Thaheer, et.al. (2013) for the brutality, multiple displacements and forcible recruitment by the LTTE and fodder they became during the last stages of the war. Their trauma is not negligible.

Against this backdrop, the majority of people in these communities register their reservations and feelings of exclusion, while militarised development projects by the state and external forces are the norm. Their sense of an inability to shape their lives and future leaves them with a profound sense of continued struggle and marginalisation in areas that were their traditional homelands (Ibid.: 32-44). Roads, factories, flyovers and other such large-scale infrastructure projects have limited resonance with citizenry of the post-war area, who carry a demonstrable and understandable mistrust of its benefits to the local community (Ibid.: 61). This context suggests that when the garment companies and military began recruiting for factory positions, this population was in a vulnerable position with little bargaining power to refuse the positions, low levels of trust that the companies had their best interests at heart and few livelihood alternatives. It certainly was not the case that workers and their families were presented with several options for generating livelihoods that would enable them to move beyond basic survival from one day to the next. Although this may not literally qualify as 'forced' labour, for practical purposes it is not unreasonable to assert that workers were intimidated, cajoled and persuaded to get off the land and into wage labour – a defining characteristic of so-called primitive accumulation.

It is within this milieu that several garment factories have been set up in the North and East, with the government offering a variety of incentives for investors. By 2011, according to the secretary general of the Joint Apparel Association Forum (JAAF), three garment factories had already been set up in the Eastern Province and nine were in development (Samaraweera 2011). Factories were first set up in 2008 in Batticaloa and Trincomalee, because hostilities had decreased in the Eastern Province more than they had in the North. Since 2011 garment companies have opened factories in Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mannar (Crabtree 2012; *The Island*, 10 August 2013, October 18 and 6 January 2012).

The government offered a five-year tax holiday, favourable land leasing terms, communications and electricity infrastructure, and fast-track development approvals to the investors. The government has also built numerous roads, bridges and other infrastructure to improve transportation networks in the former conflict areas. The investors benefited not only from these incentives, but also from larger labour pools than those that are

typically available in the South. Therefore, the alliance between capital and the state was facilitating a spatio-temporal fix in the North and East (Harvey 2003).[5]

State intervention in facilitating appropriate conditions for capital to invest and create employment opportunities for youth, however, is not entirely new in the Sri Lankan context. Lynch (2007) has thoroughly examined the ways in which the 200 Garment Factory Programme (GFP) was set up in rural areas as a way of creating employment opportunities for disenfranchised and disgruntled youth during the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) years. While she appropriately notes the irony associated with the fact that most JVP insurgents were men and the employment created targeted women, in the post-war eastern Sri Lankan context, women ex-combatants are far more common. Therefore, compared to the GFP, targeting women of the Eastern Province for wage labour actually seems more consistent with the state's historically established strategy of using rural industrial promotion to quell tensions and unrest.

Managers in one factory in the East reported that the investing company received US$ 1,000,000 from the Sri Lankan government to build the factory, with certain stipulations. They had to commence operations before a particular date and employ 100 workers in order to qualify for a five-year tax holiday (which covered two divisions of the larger company, not just the factory in the East). The government also fast-tracked approvals to lease the land, establish communication technologies (such as internet and cell phone service), ensure adequate electricity and recruit workers from particular villages – since the military had information about the demographic profiles of neighbouring villages. While the conflict was still ongoing, the government provided security to escort the goods out of the conflict zone and supplied secure military-based housing to the general manager because he was considered a potential target for violence. In these ways, the state aligned with capital to facilitate and jump start micro-processes of capital accumulation in the East.

It has also been necessary for each of the garment companies investing in the North and East to establish training centres prior to opening the factory for production, because the skill and education levels of the local workforce in former LTTE-controlled areas are much lower than they are elsewhere in the country. These training sessions focus on technical skills and 'soft skills,' such as time management, 'grooming' and personal hygiene. In addition, the training incorporates team-building activities. For example, in one factory, pre-job training lasted eight weeks and then on-the-job-training continued for another six months (Hagar 2012).

In one factory, employers provided one meal per shift, a second meal at a subsidised cost, transportation from home (buses or vans) and medical services on-site. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contributed funding to cover some of the

[5] Although this has many of the characteristics of a spatio-temporal fix as Harvey (2003) would define it, this particular spatio-temporal fix was driven less by a need to reinvest surplus capital and more by the state's desire to shore up its political-economic power in the North and East.

training expenses and bus transportation to villages up to two hours away.[6] A health facility was located on-site. No counsellors visited that factory (which was common in factories in the South), but a bilingual (Tamil/Sinhala) training manager often served in the capacity of a counsellor for the workers.

The active involvement of the state to offer tax holidays and financial incentives to the corporate sector feeds into a policy regime that has fervent faith in the ability of the market to deliver economic dividends to war-affected people. USAID's involvement of working together with capital and the state testifies to the centrality of the industrialisation-as-reconstruction discourse in post-war areas. Using management interviews from an apparel factory set up early in the end stages of the war, we are able to single out how important the military was for capital to set itself up. The rescripting of the national narrative involved capital at the forefront of making a labour force and changing mindsets, but one which management was unable to accomplish without military support. We turn now to our empirical evidence to tell this story, which draws on preliminary fieldwork in one factory (Factory A) and conversations with company representatives from a second factory (Factory B).

Management Ethos

The strong partnership between the government and capital was evident in how the company that owned Factory A set it up and recruited the workforce. Factory A opened before the end of the war. It started with 60 workers, and by the time of research in 2011 the workforce had grown to roughly 500. Because of the reconciliation agenda behind the establishment of the factory, the management intentionally recruited both Tamil and Sinhalese workers who were affected by the war.[7] At the time of research, 40 percent of the workers were Sinhalese and 60 percent were Tamil. While the factory was under construction, the management set up a training centre in an abandoned schoolhouse in a Sinhalese neighbourhood, and then, once the factory was complete (a process that was fast-tracked by the government), they moved there to continue training and commence operations. The government also helped the company to escort the finished garments out of the former conflict zone with armoured vehicles and built new roads out of the area with three contractors operating concurrently throughout the day and night.

The firm bussed the management team in every week from Colombo, and they stayed in company-provided housing about one hour from the factory – outside the former conflict zone. They were almost all men, Sinhalese, and did not speak Tamil – with the exception

6 Many scholars note the dialectical relationship between primitive accumulation processes and imperialism (Harvey 2003; Luxemburg 1951). Although the Sri Lankan state does not qualify as an imperial power, the active role of donor agencies such as USAID suggests that the movement of capital to the North and East was not purely a state-led initiative, but rather it was enmeshed in the wider dynamics of the global political economy.

7 While there were several Muslim workers in the factory, the lack of acknowledgement of their presence as workers or in the area is striking! In post-war Sri Lanka the coordinated attacks on Muslims with state complicity are already documented (Ismail 2013) and Batticaloa District in particular hosts more Muslims than Sinhalese (Thangarajah 2012; Ruwanpura 2006).

of the training supervisor, who was a bilingual woman (Sinhala/Tamil).[8] The general manager was a middle-aged Sinhalese man who was well-connected to the elite business networks, having attended one of the top boys' private schools in Colombo. On the drive to the factory, he constantly fielded phone calls from colleagues and other associates who were networking with him for one reason or another. Therefore, from the beginning the management structure of this particular factory was set up in a way that reproduced class, ethnicity, West/East, gender and urban/rural distinctions rather than attempting to dismantle them.

The general manager drove to the factory from Colombo in a 17-year-old army-like jeep each week, which he said took about five hours each way. He had been doing this trip for three years, since the factory opened. When we asked why he kept a job with such a long commute for so long, he said he liked it because he felt like he was going out to the 'Wild East'. Especially in the beginning, when the war was still on, he said that he felt a sense of adventure about going there because there was an element of risk that he found exciting. At that time, the government had arranged for him to live in a military compound on the beach, because of the potential threat to his life. The way in which the government provided so much protection for the manager and how he saw his own role as an adventurer suggests that the government and the investing firms perceived this initiative almost as if it were a military mission in itself, or an extension of one. In fact, a manager said, "We worked with the government to come here, because it was in the government's best interest for us to come and get the LTTE out of the war, so they were very supportive at that stage". They were equally under no illusion that strategically investing early in a war-torn area was likely to pay off in their efforts to improve relationships with the government and gain political clout with the political regime. Moreover, the manager explicitly acknowledged that having USAID on board at various stages was tactical in avoiding retaliation by the LTTE because "any attack on a US partnership, it was assumed … would have a detrimental effect on [the LTTE's] funding abilities". Building alliances with the state, military and international donor community was an important aspect to high-level management life, and was a way of securing capital's incursion and place in the post-war landscape. Creating employment, then, was not easy work and required cultivating ties at the highest levels because, as they said, they were there to stay, at least for 30 years.

The management conceptualised their role as a business providing employment opportunities to the 'girls'[9] and thereby helping to raise the economic standard in the area. For example, we asked the general manager whether he thought the factory would continue to operate after the tax holiday expired, and he said yes, and then continued:

> Because… this area is definitely changing, certainly from when I first came … And when it changes, I think that the economic standard is going up in this area. And people

[8] Preliminary research indicates that other companies that set up operations in the North and East had more Tamil-speaking managers (and Tamil managers) than the factory in this case study. Therefore, this is not likely to be a general practice.

[9] As both Lynch (2007) and Hewamanne (2008) show, the vocabulary of employing and referring to workers as 'girls' or *lamai* (children) is the norm in the apparel sector of Sri Lanka. Because they have already done a superlative analysis of its connotations for management-worker relationships, it is a not a point that we labour over here.

> are getting more used to having money. There is a greater need for money, whereas earlier they would have planted something … So now they have to plant their own fields, there are people buying tractors, there are other things. So, the economic standard is going up. And when the economic standard goes up, it creates a demand for money. And the demand for money will lead to demand for jobs.

What the manager seems to be describing here is a process of primitive accumulation: an economic transformation of the area in which money and capital begin to take on more significance for the population than subsistence activities, which generates a demand for wage labour and a desire to accumulate capital. At the same time, the manager does not portray this transformation as something that benefits the company itself, but instead he clearly positions the factory as a benefactor that is raising 'standards' in the area. He also deploys a discourse of linear stages of development, in line with modernisation theory's five stages of growth that positions agricultural activities as a lower stage and manufacturing as a higher one (Rostow 1960).

In this particular factory, therefore, the management ethos was deeply imbued with the perception of the factory as a modernising force, with the very visible and symbolic support of the military and donor organisations, such as USAID. Thus, the militarisation of everyday corporate life extended into the post-war area as an assumed necessary part of the development process, rather than militarisation being positioned as the opposite of a reconciliation process (see also Thaheer, et.al. 2013). Although this factory is not necessarily representative of all new factories in the North and East in terms of the particularities of the management structure, it did set a tone in this particular local area regarding what and whom the reconstruction process would involve. The next section explores another aspect of the primitive accumulation process in this community in the East: the making of a modern workforce.

Changing Mindsets: The Making of a Modern Workforce

An integral part of the process of primitive accumulation is the creation of a new class of wage labourers (Marx 1990). This means not only ensuring a supply of labour, but also fostering a mindset of valuing work and money. The management at Factory A became keenly aware that the supply of labour in the aftermath of the conflict was not very proletarianised, and this became one of the top challenges for the human resources managers. Part of this process occurred during the initial trainings, which were subsidised by USAID, where the workers-to-be were taught not only the technical skills of sewing operations (which came last), but also the skills of managing time, discipline, personal hygiene and communicating effectively when there is a problem (rather than staying silent). As one manager said, "Most of the Tamil girls – because they hadn't gone to school – very few could read or write their names. So, we started from there".

Similar to how the management saw the factory as a mechanism for bringing about a higher economic standard in the community, they also took pride in their role in changing the mindsets of the workers. For example, when asked what it means to be a good factory or good employer, one manager on the human resources team said:

> It's about the workers... What [do] they need from us? What [do] they really need from the company? For example, how these Tamil girls – it's not of utmost importance for them, the job. So how do we handle this challenge? So we have to give a background. We have to change their minds to make them think how misinformed that was. We have to act. So, likewise, the factory should understand their employees … and their welfare.

The presumption that the management makes, therefore, is that the perceptions of the workers are 'misinformed' and require their intervention to change, and they see this as part of improving the welfare of the community as a whole – of making their mindsets more modern. In doing so, they cast themselves in the role of deploying modernity through the creation of a workforce, which bears historical baggage considering that they are mostly male, Sinhalese managers from Colombo–an epicentre for the political voice of Sinhalese nationalism.

Some of the most significant challenges that the management has had are absenteeism and retention (a plausible side effect of the difficulty of making the transition to a wage labourer). In response, the managers doubled their efforts to get workers and their families to see the importance of the factory and garment production. For example, one manager described how they incorporated this into the everyday functioning of the factory, such as during tea breaks.

> We all sit and talk with them. What are the problems that you have? And we, one-by-one, explain: What is the importance? Why do you have to be here every day? How much you can earn [sic]? What is the importance of the job? How can you manage your job, your activities [sic]?" So the face-to-face discussion, we have an impact, we have a result. Now, early days … the figures were very bad. 12-13 percent absenteeism. Now it is 6 percent.

As Gunawardana (2014) has analysed elsewhere in the Sri Lankan apparel sector, giving informal voice to workers is an important tool that managers deploy to ensure productivity gains. By cultivating intimacy and encouraging workers to voice concerns and troubles, she argues, management attempts to ply worker trust and generate affective bonds between management and labour so as to engender teamwork – which enhances productivity (Gunawardana 2014: 10; see also de Neve 2008; Ruwanpura 2014).

The managers also reported an intention to meet with parents in a similar fashion, to talk with them about what their daughter is getting from working at the factory and what the family stands to gain from making sure she goes to work every day. "The parents also commit to ensuring she comes to work, otherwise they feel guilty… We'll have a kind of commitment so they'll push". Therefore, the absenteeism and retention problems made it very clear to the management how much effort had to go into creating the kind of mindset needed to secure labour in order to set off a micro-process of capital accumulation. They felt that getting to know parents and families was an important catalyst for making a labouring class – because changing mindsets needed to extend to the social sphere too.

Another problem that the managers had in trying to create a productive, efficient workforce was to get workers to adapt to changing products. A manager described the problem and what they are doing about it as follows:

> These people are not adapted to the changes. They have been doing the same range of product for the last two years… so with [the change] these girls are a bit put under a bigger pressure… So we talk to the girls, and we train them, and we make up their mindset. Because they have to adapt to these changes, otherwise we can't go ahead. So that message we give to the employees.

By using a discourse of needing to remake their mindsets, the managers are attributing the additional pressure that the workers are under to an outdated and un-modern mindset, as opposed to a variety of other factors that could be causing this additional stress – such as the psychological effects of trauma. This suggests a lack of understanding about the effects of trauma in general among management, as well as its potential effects on productivity. Therefore, the managers interpreted the problem as a lack of development and modern thinking among their workforce, and the steps they took to change their mindsets were about creating a new class of workers that responds to incentives, values their jobs, has ambitions for the future and is willing to be adaptable for the sake of the production team or the factory as a whole. What was also revealing in their sentiments was that despite similarities recorded by feminist scholars regarding other areas in Sri Lanka (Goger 2013; Lynch 2007; Hewamanne 2008), the Sinhalese managers felt that they are duty-bound to uplift a 'backward' minority community to the modern standards – never mind that a predominantly Sinhalese workforce elsewhere is similarly imbued in processes of uneven social shifts. The paternalism and the implicit ethno-nationalist frameworks that they were drawing upon were hardly subject to reflection. Nor was there deliberation on the particularities of using former LTTE cadres, who had been subject to intensely disciplined forms of regimentation and were now being moved into another highly regimented setting – a point that we return to in our next section. Therefore, the managers in Factory A were not merely creating a new class of workers, but also drawing upon paternalistic and ethno-nationalist tropes to produce worker-subjects who were obedient and motivated to respect newer forms of authority than those that were previously dominant in the East along gender and ethnic lines. These acts of primitive accumulation, deployed through the labour process, met the dual goals of increasing capital accumulation and supporting the state in its effort to consolidate its symbolic power in the former conflict. The next section goes deeper into how this process of proletarianisation (within the broader context of primitive accumulation) was not just about accumulation but also about building a narrative of the 'new' Sri Lanka.

Rescripting the Nation

Earlier we argued that one of the reasons why the Sri Lankan government sought to incentivise industry leaders to invest in the North and East is to enhance its symbolic power. In this section, we draw on the management interviews to document the role of capital in trying to advance the goal of creating the 'new', post-war, unified and multiethnic

Sri Lanka, and, in so doing, rendering which aspects of the past were worth preserving and prioritising, and which were to be discarded.

'Leaving the war at the door' was a stipulation required of all workers and was reasoned to ensure that any strains and antagonisms between the two communities would not surface within the factory premises. In fact, there was a palpably naïve view among management that merely putting together the two groups of workers would be sufficient to 'figure out a way'. They went on to say that although there was initial wariness towards each other, this cautiousness has subsided. Yet, during the first author's field visit, being witness to a fainting episode of a worker led to interesting discussions with management about how initially a notable proportion of Tamil workers were subject to fainting spells. Managers themselves suggested and acknowledged that the trauma inflicted by the war was the likely root cause, and they claimed it was declining because of social pressure from their peer groups rather than because of any disciplinary actions or pressures from the management. Thus, the new nation these managers were helping to forge was based on principles of self-negotiation of challenges ('they will figure it out themselves') that emphasised sameness and downplayed difference. The managers reasoned that not talking about distinctions, which they believed would be a way of staying stuck in the past, was necessary to move forward – which was what they felt post-war Sri Lanka needed.

While events at the factory, such as spells, fainting episodes and fits of crying, disclosed that workers brought their wartime experiences into the factory setting, managers were displacing its central import in shaping labour relations and labour-management relations. For example, the managers said that there had been no training for the managers and executives at any point – not from the company or from USAID – on how to effectively work with a traumatised workforce in a sensitive manner, such as learning what the effects of trauma are and how it might affect work performance. Unsurprisingly, therefore, despite management's efforts at emphasising similarity, workers communicated their resistance to everyday shop floor life through high labour turnover – higher than the norm in the rest of Sri Lanka according to the managers – and high rates of absenteeism (see also de Neve 2012).

In this scripting of a forward-looking and modern nation state, there was little reflection on how traumatised people move into regimented workplaces or how rehabilitated former LTTE cadre shifted from one form of regimentation to another mode of disciplining within production sites. In addition to Ong's (1987) valuable interventions on these debates, what we want to suggest is that this disciplining is also about a silencing and perpetuating a tyranny of ethno-nationalist hegemony in post-war Sri Lanka. In other words, it is not only an economic incentive that is driving this process. Moreover, similar to Lynch's (2007) suggestion that despite men being at the forefront of youth insurrections in Sri Lanka, which similarly holds true for paramilitary forces,[10] the disciplining of bodies into a 'modern' workforce has involved those of young women's bodies. Almost a decade

[10] While there were also women fighters in the LTTE, if all paramilitary forces are taken together there were still more men than women among these armed youth.

later, the state and capital remain transfixed on incorporating and disciplining women's bodies into the labour process and, in this situation, shifting them from one form of regimentation to another.

This silencing is also apparent in the ways in which language differences are (not) negotiated or even considered important within the post-war milieu within which factories are located. With an all Sinhala-speaking cast of senior managers from outside the region, with no ability to speak Tamil or, it seemed, little need to learn Tamil, they simply relied on workers and managers from the two communities to speak through an informal sign language system. Save the one bilingual middle manager, a training supervisor who was a Tamil speaker from the area, they relied upon workers to resolve language barriers themselves: "…the Tamil girls have picked a little bit of Sinhala, Sinhalese girls have picked up a little bit of Tamil. So, they communicate in that sense… they will come up with their own strategies and they will work with each other to figure out a way… because communication is more of necessity." This downplaying of the importance of language and shared communication between the two groups fixes the workers in a passive victim position that deprives both sets of workers of expressing and exerting their agency. The silencing is binding – both as workers and as people from a minority community in a post-war setting. Therefore, the scripting of post-war Sri Lanka, in practice, required Tamil workers in this war-affected area to embrace capital's incursion, which would occur primarily through the victorious community's vision and, literally, on its terms. We argue that these processes of scripting production are one way that the primitive accumulation process helped bolster the state's effort to consolidate its symbolic power as well as meeting capital's goal of accumulation.[11]

Another way in which the management actively participated in nation-building (in addition to workforce building) was by promoting teamwork. Managers explicitly described how their efforts to build a team culture were an attempt to foster unity between the two groups of workers: "Even if you go for lunch, the team had to go together… everything was done as a team, so that created like 'This is our team' [feeling]… It created that kind of culture". They wanted to forge harmony so that any simmering tensions would be smoothed over as workers got to know each other better and came to rely on one another.

In this narrative, the workplace was constructed as the venue through which ethnic harmony could be potentially generated – 'business for peace', literally. While it was seemingly an exercise generated for the maintenance of a post-war nation's integrity, there was no hint of acknowledging how collaborative team work is also potentially beneficial for productivity gains (see also Goger 2013). Therefore, another thing that was downplayed in this process of primitive accumulation was capitalist self-interest and how tightly it was woven into the post-war national identity. The harmony and integrity of the post-war nation-state became the primary focus, while the fact that capital benefits from this process as well went unacknowledged.

[11] The contradiction here is, however, that ineffective communication is likely to have had a negative effect on productivity and efficiency, which the managers said the factory struggles with.

The managers also actively sought to discard practices that the Sinhala-speaking managers found out of sync with instilling cooperation and collaboration among workers. While caste politics shape social relations within Sinhalese and Tamil communities, Sri Lankan Tamils are more likely to exert caste hierarchies visibly and even blatantly (Thangarajah 2012). In contrast, there is a subtlety to how the Sinhalese deploy caste relations within their communities – with its visibility surfacing when sealing proposed marriage transactions (Jayawardena 2002). For the Sinhalese, caste exists, but as they perceived themselves to be a modern and genteel people, this did not see themselves as getting embroiled in its everyday politics and manifestations. This did not necessarily hold true for Tamils – or, so our Sinhala managers seemed to imply. Consequently, when a Tamil worker refused to sit next to another worker at lunch – on the same bench – because of their varying caste rankings, the management communicated to the worker(s) that caste politics simply did not have a place in the workplace. The manager said that he informed the worker – and by default all others – that it was fine if they wanted to believe in caste differences but then they would need to go home to eat; and, most crucially, not return to the factory.

Caste, then, was to be practiced in the home and kin relationship setting, but it was not allowed in the workplace, because that was not the proper place for it. This particular packaging of caste dynamics within the workplace by (Sinhalese) businessmen, while concerned with the jettisoning of unsavoury social relations, was also a moment in which the slippage between the modern post-war nation and capital's interest became apparent. Management did not condemn caste politics as not having a place in 'modern' society, and indeed said that it can be practiced at home – this is the worker's prerogative; however, it simply has no place in the capitalist workplace, where ethnic frictions and caste tensions can equally create discord and work against the much-needed team spirit for capitalism to flourish. In these ways, capital was deeply involved in the process of rescripting the nation-state by exercising authority to discard caste practices from the factory space and inscribe a boundary between home and work, public and private, that had not existed before.

The interviews at Factory A suggest a plethora of ways in which capital is part of the state's (neoliberal) nation-building project and actively promotes certain aspects of Sri Lankan modernity, while casting others aside. The managers deployed discourses of sameness, self-negotiation of challenges and teamwork that were not only framed as important for production but, even more so, necessary for reconciliation. At the same time, they downplayed the importance of interethnic communication, caste and ethnic differences, trauma and female workers' past experiences of militarised regimentation. Altogether, we argue that these efforts on the part of managers were supportive of the state's efforts to consolidate its symbolic power, effectively silencing Tamil voices and perpetuating an ethno-nationalist hegemony in post-war Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

The Sri Lankan state has been a highly visible and active player in the former conflict areas in the North and East, from the militarisation of society to the nation-building rhetoric of

the authoritarian regime. The role of capital and its alliances with the state have been far more conspicuous on the scene and, as a result, it has largely been able to set up industrial production regimes without much debate or critical engagement. The main contribution of this paper, therefore, is to begin unpacking the role of capital and state-capital relations in the reconstruction process – which we characterised as a post-war form of primitive accumulation and, specifically, proletarianisation – through the case of a garment factory that was set up in the East. Based on our case study, we argued that capital was deeply involved in a process of primitive accumulation that actively bolstered an ethno-nationalist, militarised project of the state to consolidate its symbolic power in the former conflict areas.

We showed how the state supported capital in its efforts to establish a new capitalist mode of production, from providing security to giving tax breaks and fast-tracking the development approval process. Then, we examined how the management saw its role in the East as not only about producing garments but – even more so – providing employment to advance 'standards' and modernise the area, while downplaying how capital itself benefitted from the arrangement. Next, we turned to the management's task of creating a new labouring class, showing how capital deployed a paternalistic rhetoric of 'changing mindsets' to do so. Finally, we examined how capital was involved in the state's project of rescripting the narrative of the nation. Managers actively worked to promote a narrative of the 'new' Sri Lanka as one that values sameness, self-negotiation of challenges and teamwork, while other aspects, such as interethnic communication and trauma histories, were downplayed. All of this serves to reinforce the hegemonic Sinhalese-nationalist ideology of a modern nation, while Tamil and Muslim voices in this process were silenced.

This paper speaks to debates about primitive accumulation in several ways as well. First, it highlights how primitive accumulation can take shape in a post-war society, suggesting that in this context the relationship between the state and capital is especially important to understand. Specifically, the dynamic is qualitatively different from how primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession and proletarianisation have been depicted in the literature, because Sri Lanka is not an imperial power, so the forms of political power and strategies available to the state for resolving capitalist crises are more limited and contained within the national territory. This may help explain why such a strong partnership and alliance between the state and capital was forged in the North and East.

Second, it confirms the importance of understanding the complex dynamics of creating a workforce in particular settings of primitive accumulation, rather than seeing it as a process that occurs the same way everywhere. For example, the ways in which this particular workforce was traumatised and, yet, how this was reframed into a 'mindset' problem raises interesting questions about how the symbolic power of the state is consolidated in development-as-reconstruction projects through the labour process.

Third, we contend that since the Sri Lankan apparel sector promotes itself as producing 'garments without guilt' in the global clothing landscape and boasts of superlative ethical standards (Ruwanpura and Wrigley 2011; Goger 2014), its entry into a post-war setting raises pertinent questions worth revisiting about what ethicality and ethical trade means vis-à-vis possibilities of primitive accumulation. It suggests a need to move beyond standardised compliance codes in order to understand what specific ethical questions are at stake in post-war settings, rather than assuming that employment is freely chosen, that workers see themselves as citizens with a voice, and that the effects of war and trauma do not shape employment relations or performance.

Because this was an exploratory study based on limited fieldwork, we are cautious about over-generalising from this particular factory to imply that all new factories in the North and East are being set up in the same way. Indeed, preliminary research suggests that the management structures and approaches to factory set-up vary considerably from one company to the next. Further research is needed to understand how the process of setting up garment factories (and how militarised it is) affects community-factory relations, recruitment and retention rates for the factor, and perceptions that Tamil workers and communities have of the government, the development process and their incorporation into the 'new' Sri Lanka via the garment factories. That said, these findings indicate that, especially in the local area of Factory A, the role of capital in the reconstruction process should not be ignored, and that studying the labour process can provide valuable insights into the politics that are emerging in the formation of a 'new' Sri Lanka.

In addition, these findings suggest that the gendered incorporation of labour into garment production in the East may be challenging and reworking conventional gender roles in significant ways. Understanding the extent of the gendered proletarianisation process and the political possibilities for collective organisation of the workforce that may or may not emerge from it are also crucial areas for further research. Because this study also focussed more on management perspectives, it is also necessary to conduct more research with workers and their families to better understand the dynamics of economic and political change that are underway. Overall, our findings suggest that micro-level understandings of how these processes of primitive accumulation in post-war areas are taking shape is of critical importance for determining whether reconstruction is truly fostering reconciliation or just reproducing dynamics of militarisation, domination and silencing – of labour, by capital. It is hence not simply the state that ought to be scrutinised but also capital for its possible culpability in post-war Sri Lanka.

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This paper examines new garment factories in the former conflict areas in the North and East of Sri Lanka to elucidate the role of capital in the Sri Lankan government's efforts to rebuild the nation following a longstanding civil war. Drawing on fieldwork in one such garment factory, we show how the state-capital alliance was manifested in this process through the management ethos, the creation of a new class of workers, and an active re-scripting of the narratives of the nation. We argue, therefore, that capital is deeply imbricated in the Sri Lankan State's militarised nation-building efforts through a process of primitive accumulation.

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